

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 1900 BST ON 26 SEPTEMBER, 2019
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**SPEECH BY THE RT HON SIR JOHN MAJOR KG CH
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN REFORM
SPANISH EMBASSY
THURSDAY, 26 SEPTEMBER 2019**

Your Excellency, may I thank you for your warm welcome and your generous hospitality here this evening.

21 years ago, Charles Grant founded the Centre for European Reform – an organisation that still continues to grow and flourish under his leadership.

At a time when it is difficult to separate fact from fiction, the need for the CER's rigorous, realistic, impartial and authoritative analysis is now greater than ever, and I am delighted to see so many of its friends and supporters here tonight.

* * * * *

When John Kerr invited me, some months ago, to speak about Europe this evening, I imagined we would be much clearer about how events were to unfold:

Clearer about how the UK will face post-Brexit challenges;

Clearer about our future relationship with Europe;

Clearer about our alliances and interests once our nation is divorced from the European Union.

We are *not*.

Nothing is clear, and it seems our country is to be hauled away from our present moorings, and set adrift to an unknown and uncertain future.

Since so *much* is unclear, I would like to talk for a few moments about European policy – and then turn, since it is unavoidable after the events of recent days, to the conduct of politics. The Prime Minister does not mince his words and – though with a little more decorum – nor will I.

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 1900 BST ON 26 SEPTEMBER, 2019
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

At the moment, our country is more unsettled, more divided, than I can ever recall. Because our future direction is unknown, supporters and opponents of the European Union are still arguing over *principles*, while *practical* preparations make little progress.

Ministers assure us they are moving towards a deal. The European Union tells us they are not – because *no* new or viable proposals have been put forward by the British Government.

The Prime Minister tells us he wishes to have a deal with Europe. But we don't see him sitting down in Brussels, hammering out an agreement.

Instead, we do see him wrestling with bulls in Scotland; inspecting eggs in Wales; and arguing with the public in high streets – for all the world as if an election campaign was already in full swing.

We see him denying his visit to a hospital is a photo opportunity, because “there are no reporters or cameras present”.

Oddly, at the same time, these non-existent cameras stream pictures of him onto our television screens, while photographers crowd the corridor.

It is difficult to know what to say about such contradictions. But more serious disparities are at hand.

Ministers tell us, with a straight face, “We obey the law” while the Prime Minister insists we will leave the EU on 31 October – even though an Act of Parliament has been passed forbidding that to happen without a deal.

I will return to this later.

Lip service is paid to the *unanimous* judgment of the Supreme Court – that it was unlawful to prorogue Parliament for five weeks – whilst the Prime Minister tells us the *Court* was wrong and *he* was right: that is the cry of those found guilty of misdemeanours throughout the ages.

Meanwhile, Ministers continue to offer fantasy outcomes of what a post-Brexit future holds for people in every corner of our United Kingdom.

EMBARGOED UNTIL 1900 BST ON 26 SEPTEMBER, 2019
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Even if – at this late stage – some deal is cobbled together with the European Union, it is likely to be flimsy and partial. As day succeeds day, it seems more likely – not *certain*, but more *probable* – that we will end up leaving the European Union without any deal at all.

Last night, the Prime Minister wilfully destroyed any hope of cross-Party agreement.

Of course, in those circumstances, we will still have to reach an agreement with our European partners about our future relationship. But we will do so in a far more hostile atmosphere.

The price of such a negotiating failure will be widespread and will affect rich and poor alike – with one difference: the poor will be far less able to protect themselves.

I do *not* wish – yet again – to focus on the short-term chaos of a “no deal” Brexit; *nor* on the sour atmosphere a no-deal outcome would create; *nor* on the economic cost of abandoning so much that has given us prosperity; *nor* on the myriad difficulties business and individuals will face; *nor* on the disbelief at our folly of so many of our long-term friends and allies around the world.

What I *do* wish to focus on is the impact of our leaving *without* a good deal will have on our country, our citizens, and our future.

Far more is at stake than simply our relationship with the European Union. At stake also is our relationship with the wider world and – because of the nature of our Brexit debate – very probably the future of our domestic politics as well.

I don't believe, after the schism Brexit has created, that we will be able to return to the *status quo ante*.

The Government constantly tells us that everyone is fed up with Brexit. So am I. They tell us everyone wants an end to Brexit. So do I.

But *no-one* should believe that Brexit will end on the day we leave – whether that is on 31 October or beyond.

Far from it. The impact of Brexit – both internally and externally – will be felt negatively for a *very* long time.

EMBARGOED UNTIL 1900 BST ON 26 SEPTEMBER, 2019
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

From the outset, the Government's whole negotiating strategy – if such it can be called – has been driven by a desire to win the support of the anti-European hard Right of the Conservative Party, together with like-minded media.

It was always likely to be a fruitless task. They were *utterly* hardline on Europe: always committed to Brexit at any and all cost – and were an unpersuadable audience: *uninterested*, *unwilling* to compromise and – as is now only too clear – *dismally unprepared* to abandon their fond simplicities for the realities of our modern world.

They were appeased too much; for *too* long; and by *too* many. But they held to their convictions and spread them – often without reason and beyond scruple.

Their opposition has made a deal almost impossible to obtain. But we *still* need to reach an agreement with our partners.

But – if the Government *is* to get a deal; if the House of Commons is to approve it; if the scars of Brexit are to be diminished; then there must be compromise in the negotiations.

And not only compromise, but understanding – from *both* sets of negotiators.

Little of that has been forthcoming.

British Brexiteers promised the earth and misled themselves – and worse, the nation. But they failed to understand the concerns of the European Union, or even the very basics of negotiation.

It is equally fair to point out that the European Union have failed to take account of what the European Union loses when Britain departs. They lose:

- the second-largest economy;
- one of only two nations with a nuclear capacity and a military capability;
- the long reach of British foreign policy;
- access to our intelligence, counter-terrorist and policing expertise.

These losses are serious for both sides. Diminishing British access to the Galileo Navigation System, or Europol, or the European Arrest Warrants, was a petty and short-sighted approach.

EMBARGOED UNTIL 1900 BST ON 26 SEPTEMBER, 2019
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

The European Union needs to understand that diminishing the UK will inevitably diminish the European Union as well.

The effect of Brexit may leave a long-term impact on our political system.

Both our main political parties are in disarray – split fundamentally over the European question and the future direction of policy.

At present there is much talk of a General Election. In the present atmosphere it would be likely to become the most unsavoury election of modern times.

All Parties profess to believe an election is necessary to clear the air. I disagree.

Until Brexit is resolved, a general election would solve *nothing*. It would merely fuel the current feeling of disillusionment and disunity. Far from healing the nation, it would scratch away at open wounds.

It may also be pointless, as the most likely outcome is another fragmented Parliament – even more bitterly divided than it is now.

So why is the Government so keen to put our country through that?

There may be a political calculation behind their thinking:

- (i) They believe the Labour Party is unelectable under the present leadership, and are keen to ensure no new Leader is put in place before the next election;
- (ii) Ministers have read the *unredacted* version of “Yellowhammer”. They *know* how serious the problems will be for the people of this country after a “no deal” Brexit, and wish to have the election out of the way before the reality of the mess that lies ahead becomes clear.

Let me put it another way:

If the Government was truly confident in the aftermath of their Brexit policy, they would wait for next Spring; take credit for the success of Brexit; rejoice – even gloat – that all fears about it were unfounded; and propose a few popular “One Nation” policies to restore the fortunes of the Conservatives.

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 1900 BST ON 26 SEPTEMBER, 2019
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

But instead, to reinforce their electoral appeal, the Government seems intent on whipping up dissent by using highly emotional and evocative language that can only provoke fear and anger, and fuel grievances against Parliament and the Law.

Consider what this means.

It means this Government wishes to win re-election, by inciting opposition to the most important bulwarks of our State and its freedom.

Their approach is profoundly *un*-Conservative and – whatever its short-term effect – will do permanent damage to the reputation of the Conservative Party.

I cannot believe *any* previous Government – in our long history – would have even considered such reckless and divisive behaviour.

We were promised, during the referendum campaign, that Brexit would – and I quote: “... restore Parliamentary Sovereignty and the supremacy of UK Law”.

For that reason, I am assuming there will be no further political trickery from this Government.

I referred earlier to the contradiction between the Act prohibiting the UK leaving the EU without a deal, and the Prime Minister’s continued assertion that he will leave on 31 October.

My fear is that the Government will seek to bypass *Statute Law*, by passing an Order of Council to suspend the Act until after 31 October.

It is important to note that an Order *of* Council can be passed by Privy Councillors – that is Government Ministers – *without* involving HM The Queen.

I should warn the Prime Minister that – if this route is taken – it will be in flagrant defiance of Parliament and *utterly* disrespectful to the Supreme Court.

It would be a piece of political chicanery that no-one should ever forgive or forget.

* * * * *

EMBARGOED UNTIL 1900 BST ON 26 SEPTEMBER, 2019
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Like many in my Party, who have been expelled for voting with their conscience, I am a life-long Conservative.

I hope our millions of traditional, moderate, middle-of-the-road supporters understand that this Conservative Government's present position is an aberration.

Most Conservatives are *not* a Brexit Party tribute band, nor have we abandoned our core values to find compromise, seek allies, and strive for unity, rather than division and disarray.

We do *not* believe we have the right to ignore the voices of millions of others, whose opinions differ from our own.

And we abhor the language of division and hate – and words such as “saboteur”, “traitor”, “enemy”, “surrender”, “betrayal” have *no* place in our Party, our politics, *nor* in our society.

It is emphatically *not* who we are as a people. And must *never* be seen as so.

I hope that the Conservative Parliamentary Party will regain its sense of balance, and rein in the faction of a faction that now prevails in Cabinet.

Now that Parliament is sitting again, it has the opportunity to prove its quality, its strength, its purpose and its power.

I hope that *every* Member of Parliament – from *all* Parties – will unite together, and rise to that challenge.

Only then can we – the United Kingdom *and* the European Union – forge a new beginning and a new future – with hope and prosperity – and in friendship, together.